

## **What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?**

CWD is a neurological (brain and nervous system) disease found in deer and elk in certain geographical locations in North America. The disease belongs to a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) or prion diseases. The disease attacks the brains of infected deer and elk and produces small lesions that result in death. While CWD is similar to mad cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep, there is no known relationship between CWD and any other TSE of animals or people.

## **How is it spread?**

It is not known exactly how CWD is spread. It is believed that the agent responsible for the disease may be spread both directly (animal to animal contact) and indirectly (soil or other surface to animal). It is thought that the most common mode of transmission from an infected animal is via saliva and feces.

## **Where has it been found?**

CWD is known to infect wild deer and elk in north-eastern Colorado and southern Wyoming, and wild deer in western Colorado, western Nebraska, south-western South Dakota, south-central Wisconsin, south-central New Mexico and west-central Saskatchewan. It has been diagnosed in game ranches in Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma, Kansas, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

## **Is it dangerous to humans?**

There currently is no convincing evidence that the agent of CWD affects humans. However, public health officials recommend that human exposure to the CWD agent be avoided as they continue to research the disease.

## **What precautions should hunters take?**

Health officials advise hunters not to consume meat from animals known to be infected with the disease. Boning out meat is recommended. In addition, they suggest hunters take the normal simple precautions when field dressing carcasses.

## **How can you tell if a deer has CWD?**

Infected animals may not show any symptoms of the disease. In some stages of the disease, however, infected animals begin to lose bodily functions and display abnormal behavior such as staggering or standing with very poor posture. Animals may have an exaggerated wide posture, or may carry the head and ears lowered. Infected animals become very emaciated (thus wasting disease) and will appear in very poor body condition. Infected animals will also often stand near water and will consume large amounts of water. Drooling or excessive salivation may be apparent. Note that these symptoms may also be characteristic of diseases other than CWD.

## **What should I do if I see a deer that shows CWD symptoms?**

Unless your state wildlife agency or another appropriate authority has issued other instructions or regulations, you should accurately document the location of the animal and immediately contact the nearest officer or employee of the State Wildlife Agency. Do not attempt to contact, disturb, kill, or remove the animal.

## **Can I have deer tested?**

In general, the answer is no if you live in an area where CWD has not been documented. Testing is currently only available in areas where CWD has been detected in wild deer. Much effort is being devoted to increasing the laboratories that are certified to do the testing.

## **Is the meat safe to eat?**

While the agent that produces chronic wasting disease in deer and elk has not been positively identified, there is strong evidence to suggest that abnormally shaped proteins, called prions are responsible. Research completed to date indicate that the prions accumulate in certain parts of infected animals -the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils, and spleen. Based on these findings, hunters are recommended to not eat meat from animals known to be infected with CWD. Hunters in CWD areas are also

advised to bone out their meat and to not consume those parts where prions likely accumulate.

## **What is being done to combat CWD?**

Efforts to address CWD are accelerating rapidly. In facilities with captive animals known to have or to have been exposed to CWD, management is concentrating on quarantining or killing of every animal and burning of all carcasses. In some cases around captive populations, double fencing is recommended to prevent direct contact between captive and wild animals

In wild populations, the management option recommended is to reduce the density of animals in the infected area to slow the transmission of the disease. This is being done by selective culling of animals suspected to have been directly exposed to the disease. In Colorado, Nebraska and Wisconsin, large numbers of animals are being killed to reduce density of animals and thus slow the transmission of the disease. There is still a large need for research on the disease as many questions go unanswered. There is also a need for increased funding to support additional laboratories for testing animals for the disease.

Just about every state wildlife agency is now planning an increased effort at surveillance to detect if CWD is present. Many state agencies have banned the importation of deer and elk into the state. Some states have also halted intra-state movement of deer and elk and banned supplemental feeding programs.

Colorado has implemented regulations that allow only boned meat, quarters (without spinal column or head) or processed meat from deer or elk to be transported out of certain areas with CWD. Clean skull plates with antlers attached can also be removed. Check with the state wildlife agency in the state where you hunt to determine if they have enacted similar restrictions.

### **What can hunters do?**

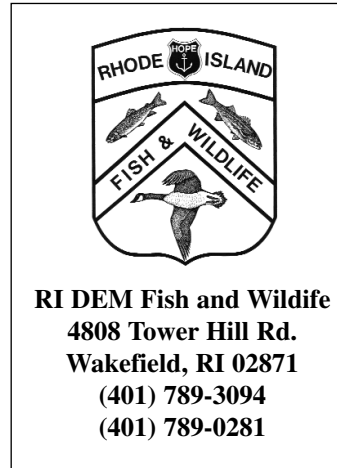
Hunters need to tell political leaders of their concerns over CWD. Indicate your support for increased financial assistance to state wildlife and agricultural agencies to combat CWD. At the state level, if your state has not yet declared a moratorium on all importation of deer and elk into the state, encourage state legislators to take that important step to prevent introduction of CWD. Encourage your state wildlife agency to carefully evaluate the risks associated with game farms. And finally, because any concentration of deer or elk assists in the spread of diseases, stop supplemental feeding programs.

### **What if I hunt in a state where CWD has not been found?**

Concerns over CWD are no reason to not enjoy this hunting season. Take the normal precautions always recommended when dressing wild game. State and provincial wildlife agencies are stepping up their surveillance for CWD, so be alert to their advisories.

### **Who should I contact to find out more?**

Hunters are encouraged to contact their state wildlife agency for more information and updates on status of the disease in that state. Most states now have information on CWD on their web sites that is updated frequently. The Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance web site is at [www.cwd-info.org](http://www.cwd-info.org). Check the site frequently for updates to this information.



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# Questions & Answers

on

# Chronic Wasting Disease

for

# Hunters

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This information was accurate as of July 1, 2002. The Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance web site is at [www.cwd-info.org](http://www.cwd-info.org). Check the site frequently for updates to this information.